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EPA honors 22 Valley companies for commuting efforts

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The Environmental Protection Agency has named 22 Phoenix area employers as Best Workplaces for Commuters.

To win the designation, a workplace must offer at least one major commuting benefit, such as transit passes, vanpool subsidies, or a significant telecommuting program. Additionally, an employer must have at least three supporting benefits such as preferred parking for carpoolers or ride-matching and must participate in an ozone awareness campaign.

The winners are: Arizona Baptist Retirement Centers, Youngtown; Carlson Wagonlit Travel - Phoenix BTSC, Phoenix; Coulter Motor Co., Tempe; Desert Highlands, Scottsdale; Fidelity National Title Insurance, Phoenix; IKEA Arizona, Tempe; ING Funds, Scottsdale; International Institute of the Americas, Phoenix; Kimley-Horn and Associates Inc., Phoenix; Malcolm Pirnie Inc., Phoenix; McKesson Provider Technologies, Scottsdale; MiniCo Inc., Phoenix; Phoenix Job Corps/ResCare, Phoenix; Pinal County, Florence; Renaissance Scottsdale Resort, Scottsdale; Sacks Tierney P.A., Scottsdale; Schreiber Foods Inc., Tempe; TERROS Inc., Phoenix; The Hartford WPLCSC, Phoenix; The Wigwam Golf Resort and Spa, Litchfield Park; Todd & Associates Inc., Phoenix; and Veolia Transportation, Tempe.

At McKesson Provider Technologies, for example, nearly 20 percent of its 550-member work force participated in a commuter program during the past 10 years saving more than \$580,000 in gasoline costs -- about \$476 per year per participant.

And, then there was the couple who got married. Melbourne Williams Jr., McKesson director of quality and process, said the husband-wife team of Darrell and Darlene Blanton has carpooled for more than four years, converted eight others to carpooling and introduced two people who ended up married.

McKesson subsidizes bus passes at a 100 percent, facilitates carpooling and vanpooling, has a ride home program in case a worker's car doesn't start or other problems arise, offers telecommuting, a bike-to-work program and a compressed work week.

According to Valley Metro research, area residents using alternate transportation modes reduced their driving by 6.6 million miles and reduced air pollutants by 226,000 pounds a day this year.

Also, one in four Valley employees telecommuted on an occasional or regular basis and bus ridership from June 2005 to June this year was at its highest level -- 59.3 million boardings compared to 56.4 million last year and 40.2 million in 2004.

Carpooling is the most common commuting alternative and about 625,000 Valley commuters (39 percent) are either telecommuting, working a compressed week or using an alternative mode of transportation, according to Valley Metro.

This year's honorees join 107 other Valley employers named in the previous two years. The companies represent about 144,300 workers using commuter programs. The Best Workplaces for Commuters is supported by Valley Metro through its Maricopa County Trip Reduction Program.